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Intelligence Memorandum

Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn: A Soviet Dilemma

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
26 September 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn: A Soviet DilemmaIntroduction

As CSCE talks resume in Geneva and the US Congress considers MFN legislation, the Kremlin deliberates on how to handle its thorniest dissidents--physicist Andrey Sakharov and novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The magnitude and duration of the press campaign directed against Sakharov, and to a lesser degree against Solzhenitsyn, had seemed to commit the regime to some follow-through action. Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, however, have upped their ante by obstinately refusing to be intimidated and by continuing to appeal to Western individuals and groups for support. They have succeeded in making their plight an international issue, and the outcry from both Communists and non-Communists in the West now threatens Soviet detente policies. This memorandum examines Moscow's resulting dilemma and the regime's options in dealing primarily with Sakharov, who represents the bigger problem.

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The letter-writing campaign against Sakharov in the Soviet press came to an abrupt halt on 8 September. Two days later the Soviet Union stopped jamming VOA, BBC, and Deutsche Welle broadcasts for the first time since the Czech invasion of 1968. Other less dramatic but still conciliatory moves have been made, such as the decision to allow ballet dancer Valery Panov to emigrate, and the granting of a visa to pianist Svyatoslav Rikhter, who did not sign any of the anti-Sakharov statements.

The cessation of press attacks on Sakharov has not silenced Western critics. Most alarming to the regime may be the glowing support for the Jackson Amendment in Congress making MFN status for the Soviet Union contingent on free emigration. At the same time, a number of private organizations have joined the fray. The US Academy of Sciences, which elected Sakharov to membership in April, has threatened not to participate in joint US-Soviet science projects if the pillorying of Sakharov is resumed. The American Psychiatric Association, prodded by a plea from Sakharov, has weighed in with a statement of support not only for the man but for his principles. An international symposium on psychiatry opens in the Soviet Union in October, and American psychiatrists are challenging Soviet authorities to allow them at that time to examine inmates of mental hospitals who claim they are confined for political reasons. Most recently, nine French scientists, including four Nobel prizewinners, added their protest.

In contrast to the hue and cry raised in the West, support for Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn in the Soviet Union has been expressed primarily by silence. Some notable names have been missing from the group attacks extracted from the Soviet intelligentsia. Even so, the authorities' allegation that Sakharov "opposed detente" distorts the campaign against him into a test of the intelligentsia's loyalty to detente policies and has probably helped enlist the support of some who otherwise would not have participated.

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An unusual feature of the recent crackdown has been the broad coverage it has received in the Soviet domestic media. The result of this has been to dispel some of the common ignorance about the existence of intellectual dissent as well as about the substance of such opinions. This publicity appears to be part of a new propaganda offensive by which the regime confronts critics directly in order to disparage them. If the leadership made an earlier decision to open the foreign airwaves to the "masses," it may have found it desirable to prepare the populace beforehand for what they would hear from abroad.

Brezhnev may have seen the campaign against dissidents in this light. The attacks on Sakharov took as a premise the desirability of detente, and one day before the final wrap-up article on Sakharov appeared in the press, Brezhnev wrote an article thanking the readers who had expressed their support of detente by their letters. Brezhnev's speech in Alma-Ata on 15 August, advocating "victory through contacts," seemed to embrace both the idea of a freer flow of information and, as a corollary, a step-up in ideological work.

The fact that the Soviet press has not picked up this theme may indicate some disagreement within the leadership. It is conceivable that a different mix of motives led different leaders to approve the press campaign. Some Politburo members may have accepted the campaign as necessary to cover their flanks as they made concessions at CSCE; others may have pushed it in the hope of complicating the course of detente. As they pursue the dual goals of detente and vigilance, Soviet leaders must now consider various options in handling the Sakharov-Solzhenitsyn case:

(1) The regime could encourage the two men to leave the country. In recent months a number of particularly troublesome dissidents have been allowed to leave the Soviet Union, after which the authorities found pretexts for revoking their citizenship. Princeton University reportedly has sent four letters to

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Sakharov offering him an academic position. The first three letters did not get through to him, but the fourth apparently has been delivered, presumably with the approval of the authorities. Sakharov reportedly stated that he is now prepared "in principle" to accept this invitation, but that he has no hope of obtaining permission to bring his family to the US. His stepchildren, whose mother is half-Jewish and half-Armenian, applied for visas in February, but their applications have gone unanswered.

In the case of Sakharov, security considerations will make this a difficult decision for the leadership. He states that he has not worked with classified materials since 1968, when his first *samizdat* essay was circulated. At that time he lost his position as chief consultant to the Soviet State Committee for Nuclear Energy. He has since been employed as a physicist at Lebedev Institute, engaged in work on general relativity, which has been described as "the least classified subject" in his field.

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In any case, security-conscious Soviet authorities tend to take an extremely cautious view of such things; they have refused to release other scientists, notably Benjamin Levich, years after their access to secret materials ended.

As for Solzhenitsyn, he has repeatedly said he will remain in Russia, regardless of the consequences.

Emigration has another, less serious drawback from the regime's point of view: exile would place Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn beyond Moscow's control. The thought of a liberated Sakharov, criticizing the Soviet Union from the safety of the "other shore,"

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is doubtless displeasing. By encouraging or allowing the exit of active dissidents, Moscow risks creating a cadre of prestigious exiles whose existence could hardly enhance the regime's international prestige. On balance, however, the regime would probably be glad to be rid of Sakharov if security considerations do not prevail, and of Solzhenitsyn if he will go.

(2) The regime may resume its offensive against the two men. If the campaign against Sakharov is re-activated, several courses are possible:

(a) The regime may press for his expulsion from the Academy of Sciences. This may well have been their intention at the outset of the letter-writing campaign. The strongest hint to this effect appeared in *Izvestia* on 30 August in a letter, signed by academician G. L. Khimich, which suggested that Soviet scientists should "take a sober view of whether Sakharov is worthy of bearing the high title of Soviet academician--a title respected by all the people."

The academy, however, is known for its independence. Only once has it expelled a member, and on occasion it has refused to admit candidates who had regime backing. The majority of the academy's members, including 23 of the 40 members of its presidium, have not endorsed the crusade against Sakharov. Two academicians, chemist Benjamin Levich and mathematician Igor Shafarevitch, publicly defended Sakharov, and prominent physicist Petr Kapitsa reportedly resisted heavy pressure and refused to sign.

By using considerable muscle, Soviet authorities probably could force Sakharov's expulsion, thereby cutting his income and depriving him of the prestige of his title. In the process, however, the regime would risk alienating major elements of the scientific community, on whom the country's technological progress ultimately depends. This step would also aggravate the foreign aspects of Moscow's problem.

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(b) The regime could arrest Sakharov or confine him in a psychiatric ward. Such action would at least silence him, but, even more than expulsion from the academy, it would risk alienation of the scientific community as well as repercussions to foreign policy. Moreover, it would necessitate action against Solzhenitsyn. In the past, Solzhenitsyn has elected to fight his battles alone, but during recent weeks he has expressed his solidarity with Sakharov.

Solzhenitsyn's new willingness to associate his own case with that of Sakharov is significant, for the two men represent two distinct and persistent strains of thought in Russian intellectual history. Sakharov, rationalist and cosmopolitan in outlook, subscribes almost in toto to Western formulas for constitutional government and civil liberty. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, falls squarely in the tradition of Russian "slavophilism." Deeply religious, scornful of the West's materialism and philistine neglect of moral values, he rejects Western institutions and looks to native sources for inspiration. The alliance of the Westernizing rationalism of Sakharov and the Russian "spiritualism" of Solzhenitsyn offers common ground on which a broad spectrum of Soviet intellectuals can meet.

Since 8 September, several Soviet officials have given US Embassy officials in Moscow oblique assurances that "nothing will happen" to Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn. On 12 September, however, an article in *Literary Gazette* blasted the two men as "obstacles to solid peace." Two days later Valentin Turchin, a Soviet scientist who publicly defended Sakharov, was censured at a meeting of employees at his Moscow institute. Although open repression seems unlikely for the present, it cannot be ruled out as a possibility.

(c) Rather than launch a frontal assault, the authorities may attempt to silence Sakharov by applying pressure in a more subtle and indirect fashion. He has stated that his greatest concern is for his

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family. Sakharov's first wife died in 1968. He is reportedly on good terms with his son, but not with his two daughters. He now lives with his second wife and her children, who reportedly support his dissident activities. During the past year they have suffered reprisals. His stepdaughter was reportedly dismissed from her university; the stepson was denied admission and told that he was a "marked man." The stepdaughter's husband lost his job. These mild forms of repression, however, have not cowed Sakharov. More open action against his family would attract some of the same adverse publicity as action against Sakharov.

(3) Finally, Moscow may hope that the case against Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn can be allowed to wither away. Several considerations militate against this outcome. First, a retreat may be psychologically unacceptable to party hard-liners. After giving Sakharov's sins wide publicity and hinting broadly that the day of reckoning was at hand, the regime stands to lose face by backing off now.

More important, this approach offers no guarantee that Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn will keep quiet. Both men seem to have cast aside all restraint in their criticism of the regime.

Even after the press campaign has ceased, they continue to make statements and offer interviews, evidently in a deliberate effort to keep the affair alive in the Western press. In a letter to a Norwegian newspaper on 11 September, Solzhenitsyn nominated Sakharov for the Nobel Peace Prize. In the same letter, however, he made it clear that his hostility to the Soviet regime did not imply any conversion to Western values. His denunciation of the West's hypocrisy and immorality would make it difficult for the Kremlin to smear him as an unpatriotic "tool of the international bourgeoisie." On 23 September, in announcements which may have been concerted, the two men in effect challenged the regime to arrest them. Sakharov admitted that he had sent unauthorized manuscripts abroad, and Solzhenitsyn stated that he had begun underground circulation of one of his banned novels.

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The determination of the two men has emboldened a few other dissidents, such as Pavel Litvinov, grandson of Stalin's foreign minister, and Lydia Chukovskaya, a novelist, to make statements of support. A group of Jewish scientists, Benjamin Levich among them, have done the same, thus associating the crusade for Jewish emigration rights with the general struggle for civil liberties. A month ago, with the trial of Yakir and Krasin, the dissident "movement" seemed to have reached its nadir. Now, largely owing to the efforts of Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, other dissidents are showing feeble signs of new life.

The outspokenness of the two men thus places the Kremlin in a dilemma. The initiative seems to have passed from the hunters to the hunted. By calling off the press attack on the two men and by deciding to stop jamming, the Soviet leadership is clearly holding out an olive branch to the West. Yet if Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn continue to speak out--as they seem determined to do--those within the leadership who place discipline at home over detente abroad will find their case strengthened.

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